



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: May 28, 2020

Agenda Item: Mt Haggin WMA – South Grazing Lease Renewal, Region 3

Action Needed: Final **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

Background: FWP proposes to renew a grazing lease on the Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area (WMA)-South system for a five-year term to extend June 15, 2021 - Oct. 5, 2025. This is a cooperative grazing system involving WMA (12,091 acres), private (2,600 acres), BLM (3,073 acres), and USFS (6,847 acres) lands, totaling 24,611 acres. The system provides reduced stocking rates and additional rest on lands neighboring the WMA, including on elk winter and calving habitat, stream/riparian systems, and forest habitats supporting all three species of forest grouse while enhancing elk early summer forage on the WMA. This lease arrangement would continue the current cash-lease grazing of 321 Animal Units/1,188 Animal Unit Months (AU/AUM) for three local livestock producers (Thompson, Bacon and Ralston) plus 178 AU/658 AUM through an exchange-of-use agreement with the Ralstons. The total annual livestock use on the Mt. Haggin WMA-South grazing system would be 499 AU/1,846 AUM. The cash lease would involve half of the standard FWP rate as the lessees would be responsible for substantial fence repairs and maintenance. The exchange-of-use agreement with the Ralstons would require rest treatments on their ranch in lieu of a cash payment.

Public Involvement Process & Results: A draft environmental assessment was completed by FWP and released for public comment Jan. 31-Feb. 29, 2020. Two legal notices were run, each in the *Butte Montana Standard*, *Anaconda Leader*, and *Helena Independent Record*; copies of the EA were mailed or notification of its availability emailed to neighboring landowners and other interested parties; public notice was posted on the FWP web page; and copies of the EA were available at the FWP Region 3 Headquarters and Butte Area Resource Office. Five parties submitted comments during the 30-day comment period. Of the respondents, four parties represented him/herself; one represented Skyline Sportsmen. Four parties stated support for Alternative A. One party did not state support for either alternative. A Decision Notice to renew this grazing lease was signed by Region 3 Supervisor Mark Deleray on 9 Mar 2020.

Alternatives and Analysis: Two alternatives were considered. Alternative A: Renewal of the Mt. Haggin WMA-South grazing lease. Alternative B: Elimination of livestock grazing on the Mt. Haggin-South grazing system. The habitat benefits and cooperative value of working with neighbors of the WMA would be lost.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission approve the Mt. Haggin WMA-South Grazing Lease Renewal. This project supports cooperative resource management across state, federal and private lands for the benefit of fish, wildlife and the recreating public.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the Mt. Haggin WMA-South Grazing Lease Renewal as proposed.